

## Legislative Testimony

### **HB7069 An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care**

**Public Health Committee, March 5, 2007**

**William A. MacDonnell, D.D.S.**

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is William (Bill) A. MacDonnell, D.D.S. from West Hartford. I am a dentist anesthesiologist in private practice and have been on the clinical faculty of the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine for almost thirty years. I have been providing "pro bono" anesthesia care on Mondays at UCONN for needy patients while teaching general practice dental residents for almost twenty (20) years. Anesthesia/sedation in the office setting is not covered by welfare. Anesthesia is only covered in the hospital setting.

Years ago I tried to sign up with the state welfare system but the Department refused to explain what reimbursement for anesthesia/sedation was in the office setting. I was faced with a true "catch 22". I would have to sign up for welfare and accept welfare fees as full reimbursement no matter what the welfare fees were. Reimbursement for anesthesia/sedation in the office setting was and is zero. So I decided like many other dentists to provide care for welfare patients "pro bono".

Many Connecticut dentists provide "pro bono" dental care for needy dental patients because it is not worth the hassle to participate with the welfare system and accept the low fees. One example the taxi driver who transported a patient to an oral and maxillofacial surgeon's office for an extraction was paid \$90+. The welfare reimbursement for an extraction is \$19. The welfare fee doesn't cover the cost of malpractice insurance.

**Welfare reimbursement for dental care is at the 30% rate. The overhead for a dental practice is 65 – 70%. There is a limit as to how much "pro bono" care can be provided.**

It is interesting to note that the current published welfare dental fees are less than the UCONN dental student fees and considerable less than the UCONN dental resident fees. One would assume that the dental school is losing money on every welfare patient they treat. Last summer, while teaching at UCONN School of Dental Medicine, I had the opportunity to review the dental fee schedules for UCONN dental students, UCONN dental residents/interns and the Connecticut State Welfare Department. I was very surprised to see that the State Welfare Dental Fees were less than those charged for dental care provided by our third year UCONN dental students and considerably less than the UCONN Residents/Intern fees.

Here are some examples of dental welfare fees, the UCONN dental student and resident/intern fees:

Procedure Code:	Description:	Student fee:	Resident/Intern fee:	Welfare fee:
0120	examination	\$23.00	\$32.00	<b>\$18.80</b>
1351	sealant	\$23.00	\$25.00	<b>\$18.43</b>
<b>1110</b>	<b>adult cleaning</b>	<b>\$37.00</b>	<b>\$48.00</b>	<b>\$36.87</b>
1120	child cleaning	\$30.00	\$34.00	<b>\$22.56</b>
2161	Amalgam Filling	\$80.00	\$96.00	<b>\$52.19</b>
7140	Extraction	\$50.00	\$90.00	<b>\$36.87</b>
3310	root canal (front tooth)	\$290.00	\$290.00	<b>\$208.01</b>

How can the current dental welfare fees be less than the fees charged by UCONN dental students and residents? It is my understanding that dental hygienists are being paid \$30 - \$45.00 per hour. Welfare pays \$36.87 for a cleaning which will not cover the hygienist's salary. Office overhead, malpractice insurance is not covered. Something is way out of line. Access to dental care is a very serious problem. Extremely low welfare dental fees have to be the major obstacle to access to care.

Dental and medical students are graduating with enormous student loan debt. I worked with a general practice dental resident at the UCONN Health Center two weeks ago. She went to UCONN undergrad at Storrs and then UCONN School of Dental Medicine. Her student loan debt is \$210,000. She is now faced with starting a family and opening a practice. How will she be able to provide either pro bono care for welfare patients or provide care at the current 30% fee level? According to the Hartford Courant (February 5, 2007) the average student loan debt for UCONN dental and medical students is \$119,000 and \$108,000. These student loan numbers were calculated prior to the announced 10% increase for next year. The UCONN website lists this year's cost of tuition, fees, books, instruments, etc. for a dental student at \$28,000 and living expenses of \$22,000. Medical student costs are similar. Please note that unlike many other students who can work during school and in the summer medical and dental students are not able to have part time employment during their schooling because of their long hours and limited free time. Their schooling is almost year round. Please note that the cost of private dental schools (Tufts, Boston University, University of Pennsylvania, etc.) is more than \$70,000/year. **(\$280,000+ for four years)**

I would suggest that your committee research and compare dental welfare fees and the dental fees paid for the state dental employee's plan(s). It would be interesting to see how dental welfare fees compare on a percentage basis with the state employee's dental plan.

Welfare fees have no effect on my practice. Please note that I only provide sedation/anesthesia for dental patients. Welfare has never paid for sedation/anesthesia in the office setting. I provide pro bono anesthesia/sedation for dental patients at UCONN School of Dental Medicine on Monday afternoons.

Connecticut has been faced with access to health care issues for the needy. Senator Harris' hearings at the Capitol in January pointed out the need for both dentists and physicians to treat the needy. At those hearing Dr. Andrew's stated that Representative Nardello was aware that some dental providers are being reimbursed at significantly greater than the published welfare fees. I submitted a Freedom of Information Request to the Department of Social Services asking for the numbers of dental providers who are being reimbursed at greater than the published welfare fees and the fees that are being paid. I have not received a formal written response to that FOI Request from the Department? At that hearing it was mentioned that Connecticut highway contractors are reimbursed at cost plus.

I think that the number of Connecticut dentists providing care for the needy would increase if the reimbursement rate were increased to the 70% level.

I will be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have. Please to not hesitate to contact me at 860.561.1233 or by e-mail at [wmacdonnel@aol.com](mailto:wmacdonnel@aol.com).

Respectfully submitted,

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